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SUBJECT: MEDVEDEV USING MVD REFORM TO INCREASE STANDING?

REF: A. MOSCOW 2892  
    [B.](#) MOSCOW 2778

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Susan Elliott for reasons 1  
.4 (b) and (d).

[¶](#)1. (SBU) President Medvedev, capitalizing on several recent high-profile events surrounding the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), introduced on December 24 proposals intended to make the MVD more professional and centralized. Medvedev has frequently discussed the need to reform the MVD since taking office, but his recent reforms appear to be more significant than earlier directives requiring police officers to be more polite and helpful. He announced a 20 percent cut in positions by 2012, higher salaries, a rotation of senior leadership, a review of hiring practices and performance standards, and that the budget for all police forces would come from federal resources. Medvedev's reforms may also dovetail with his introduction of house arrest, push to remove limits on blood-alcohol levels to create a zero tolerance policy for drinking and driving, and signature of a new tax crimes law that will prevent pre-trial detention for tax evasion and other non-violent crimes (septel). If actually implemented, Medvedev's reforms will take time and resources, and have served to put the MVD leadership on notice.

[¶](#)2. (SBU) Multiple, highly public events in 2009 coalesced in the last few days of December have heaped additional negative publicity on the MVD. Former Moscow Oblast policeman Denis Yevsyukov on December 29 "partially admitted" his guilt to charges of murdering local residents during a shooting spree in April that was caught on video and broadcast repeatedly in Russian and international media. On December 29, the Public Chamber conducted a probe into the death, while in pre-trial detention, of lawyer Sergey Magnitsky and concluded that prison authorities and investigators, who fall under the purview of the MVD, mounted an organized campaign of pressure on him that amounted to "torture," and as one committee member said, "to some degree...premeditated murder" (reftel A). Finally, on December 28, the Prosecutor General's Investigative Committee announced that former Novorossiisk policeman Aleksey Dymovskiy, who in November posted widely seen video blogs on Youtube about his knowledge of corruption in the police ranks, would be formally charged with fraud for denigrating fellow officers (reftel B).

[¶](#)3. (C) Medvedev's reform of the MVD, which remains one of the regime's main levers for suppressing demonstrations and dissent, also bolsters his standing within the elite. If he could push through the reforms, it would show increased influence and respect from the elite, and would mute liberal and Western criticism, especially coupled with his initiative to hold officials responsible for their actions. Novaya Gazeta journalist Leonid Nikitinsky told us December 28 that Medvedev had harnessed public opinion to paint Minister of Internal Affairs Rashid Nurgaliyev into a corner

and hold him on a short leash. Nurgaliyev publicly played down the seriousness of the reforms, and his willingness to fully implement them, as someone viewed as close to Putin, could provide another clue into the dynamics of the tandem.

¶4. (C) The reputation of the police forces in Russia has been low for years, with Russian polling results depicting that more than two thirds of Russians distrust the police. It probably would take major reforms sustained over years before public opinion toward Russia's police officers significantly improved. Journalists and experts have highlighted that most Soviet and Russian rulers implemented reforms of the MVD, and generally do not see Medvedev as up to the task. Medvedev, moreover, will continue to need to walk a fine line between heeding public opinion, reforming an institution that supports the ruling elite, enforcing his authority and leadership with the elite, and balancing his efforts with Putin.

Rubin